

**Testimony of
California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association
to
California Department of Food and Agriculture
on
Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill Re-authorization
Sacramento, California
State Capitol, Room 4202
August 1, 2007**

We appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on recommendations for the re-authorization of the 2007 Farm Bill. We commend Secretary Kawamura for holding this field hearing to gain knowledge and begin developing a consensus on issues important to California agriculture.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), State Departments of Agriculture and County Agricultural Commissioners collectively work to prevent pest outbreaks from reaching a national level. Each agency operates pest prevention programs that are complimentary, but are different in focus.

In California, each county agricultural commissioner is charged with the protection of agriculture, the protection of the environment as well as protection of the public's health and safety. These goals are accomplished through the management of programs designed to achieve our mission through a combination of public outreach, industry education and enforcement actions. Our programs include pest detection, exclusion, eradication, enforcement and management, seed certification, nursery inspection, egg inspection and crop statistics.

One of the major areas of focus and a growing concern for County Agricultural Commissioners is the increasing occurrences of dangerous pests to agriculture, the environment and human health. Many of these pests are introduced species that have become established despite the best efforts of the agricultural commissioners and CDFA to keep them out. An example would be the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter that continues to be under intensive control efforts.

Federal, State and County officials are continuing to battle with exotic pests and invasive species that threaten California's \$31.8 billion agricultural industry (2004 crop year direct farm sales). Exotic pest damage to California agriculture amounts to an estimated \$3 billion annually. Among the exotic pests of concern to the agricultural industry are the Mediterranean fruit fly, red imported fire ant, and the glassy-winged sharpshooter. Another threat is sudden oak death, responsible for tens of thousands of dead oak trees in California.

This IS NOT a California-only challenge. Whether it's Bingham County, Idaho, combating potato cyst nematode; Illinois, New Jersey and New York battling Asian longhorned beetles; Indiana, Ohio and Michigan fighting emerald ash borer; or Florida continually struggling with citrus canker, both the treasuries of States and the federal government are spending multiple-hundreds-of-million dollars.

Despite our best inspection efforts, pests and diseases still find their way into the U.S. The introduction of exotic pests such as the European Corn Borer, Japanese Beetle, Gypsy Moth, Chestnut Blight, Citrus Canker, and Soybean Cyst Nematode, are just a few examples of pests and diseases that have been introduced. Many of these pests have established large ranges and have increased farmer's costs of production, not only in the materials and time to control them, but also in the loss of crop yield.

We do not seem to be gaining any ground in the fight with invasive species. Consider, "the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) estimates that introduced plant pests result in an annual **\$41 billion loss** to American agriculture and cost taxpayers millions more dollars in control expenditures." Ironically, many State Agriculture Departments have lost significant levels of funding – and more losses are projected.

The need to enhance our efforts to protect our nation's food supply is greater than ever. With the increasing movement of people and commerce, our environment and food supply is at serious risk from the accidental or intentional introduction of exotic and invasive species.

The U.S. is particularly vulnerable to these invasive organisms due to the diversity of its agricultural production and the trade of agricultural products with other states and foreign countries. Numerous pathways exist throughout the U.S. for incoming pests and diseases, such as airports, parcel carriers, truck terminals, produce and import markets, ports and similar locations. Despite inspection efforts by agricultural officials, these locations can act as a potential gateway to the entire nation because of the volume of incoming commerce and travel.

The California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association have been working over the past few years with USDA, members of California's congressional delegation and others to proactively develop solutions to these ever-growing challenges. The USDA believes "Early detection of pests minimizes agricultural production costs, enhances product quality and marketability, and results in an abundant and affordable supply of food, fiber, plants, and plant products for domestic and export markets." We agree.

Interception of pests and diseases at the earliest point of entry is our primary defense against the introduction and spread of exotic pests and diseases. If an extensive inspection and surveillance program is in place when these pests come in on plant shipments to and between the States, the spread of these pests and diseases will likely be prevented.

If pests escape the inspection, then early detection through adequate pest trapping and surveys is critical for an effective response. When a new pest or disease is delimited quickly, multiple eradication options are available. But, if the organism is not recognized until it has become widespread, the ability to control or eradicate the disease or contaminant becomes at best difficult, and in some instances, impossible.

Congressman Richard Pombo and Congressman Jim Costa have introduced bi-partisan legislation, HR 4049, "The Early Pest Detection and Surveillance Improvement Act." The California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association strongly support this legislation. If enacted, this legislation would establish an enhanced framework for USDA cooperative funding agreements with States for pest and disease prevention programs. Adequate funding will enhance pest detection, and inspection and surveillance programs to prevent pests and diseases from becoming established, and facilitate their eradication if introduced. For States that do not have a pest prevention program in place, this funding would provide an incentive to start a program, and by doing so, will help protect agriculture and the environment in their state. While the legislation has been introduced we continue to seek input from industry groups that will provide enhancements to the bill. We are seeking HR 4049 to be included into the upcoming Farm Bill.

Put simply, this effort is about "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." As proof, a University of California, Berkeley, study found that the investment in pest prevention has returned 8 to 14 times the cost in economic benefits, when just four of the numerous pests that impact agriculture production and marketing are kept out of the State. That estimate does not include the external costs of impacts on the environment and public health from increased pesticide use that is averted.

We must act NOW! The challenge is not getting any easier, nor less costly. Consider, since 1993, the value of U.S. imports has doubled to approximately \$42 billion. On the export side, the federal government's successful efforts to reduce international trade barriers have increased agricultural exports. Volumes of air cargo are doubling every five to six years and an increasing percentage of this cargo consists of perishable commodities such as cut flowers, fruits, and vegetables. This perceived economic good news is partially offset when considering the multiple million dollar costs incurred by state and federal governments to eradicate invasive pests annually.

I want to take this opportunity to insure that everyone understands it is not our intention to inhibit or impede international or interstate commerce, in any way. By enhancing and focusing our efforts toward early pest detection and surveillance we believe we can get to the source of a potential problem more quickly and efficiently. It is solely our intent to be able to provide California, and the nation, with the greatest level of protection against plant and animal pests and diseases that can adversely impact human health, commerce, and natural resources in an appropriate balance with limited impediments to trade.

An enhancement to the current framework and a continuous, adequate baseline of federal funding for early pest detection and surveillance is vital.

**Statement before
California Department of Food and Agriculture
on
Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill Re-authorization
presented by
Mr. Greg Van Wassenhove
County Agricultural Commissioner, Santa Clara County, California,
on behalf of
California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association
August 1, 2006
Sacramento, California**

Good afternoon. My name is Greg Van Wassenhove and I am the Agricultural Commissioner for Santa Clara County, California, and representing the statewide Association of County Agricultural Commissioners. We appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on recommendations for the re-authorization of the 2007 Farm Bill.

One of the major areas of focus and a growing concern for County Agricultural Commissioners is the increasing number of times we are finding exotic pests that impact agriculture, the environment, and human health. In most cases, these pests are introduced species that have become established despite the best efforts of the county agricultural commissioners and CDFA to keep them out.

Exotic pest damage to California agriculture amounts to an estimated \$3 billion annually. That's nearly 10% of the \$31.8 billion dollar value for California agriculture. Most recently, we have seen damages from Mediterranean fruit fly, which is currently under eradication efforts in my home county of Santa Clara; Red Imported Fire Ant, which was eradicated here in Sacramento but continues to pose problems in several California counties; the current Peach Fruit Fly eradication efforts in Fresno County; and of course, the Glassy-winged sharpshooter. In fact, the Med-fly introductions were so commonplace in the Los Angeles Basin, that an on-going release of sterile Med-flies is needed to keep the area eradicated. Other threats to our environment include Sudden Oak Death, responsible for tens of thousands of tree losses in California, and the recent introduction of Asian long-horned borer here in Sacramento that threatens our urban forest and landscape.

This IS NOT a California-only challenge. Whether it's Bingham County, Idaho, combating potato cyst nematode; Illinois, New Jersey and New York battling Asian long-horned beetles; Indiana, Ohio and Michigan fighting emerald ash borer; or Florida struggling with citrus canker, both the treasuries of States and the federal government are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to combat infestations.

USDA/APHIS has said “Early detection of pests minimizes agricultural production costs, enhances product quality and marketability, and results in an abundant and affordable supply of food, fiber, plants, and plant products for domestic and export markets.” We agree.

But we also know from first hand experience here in California, that if an extensive pest prevention program is in place when these pests travel between states, their spread will likely be prevented.

So why not fund a national program to stop pest introductions by performing an inspection at the first available point of entry in a state, and by establishing the CAPS program as a second level of defense should they escape entry point inspections.

With this objective in mind, Congressmen Richard Pombo and Jim Costa have introduced bi-partisan legislation, HR 4049, "The Early Pest Detection and Surveillance Improvement Act." If enacted, this legislation would establish an enhanced framework for USDA cooperative funding agreements with States - to prevent pests and diseases from becoming established; and, to facilitate

their eradication if introduced. For States that do not have a pest detection or inspection and surveillance program in place, this funding would provide an incentive to start a program, and by doing so, will help protect their agriculture and the environment.

We are currently working with other states and industry groups on amendments that will reach a national consensus of support for HR 4049. This bill has 38 co-sponsors nationwide already, the amended version has the support of the Western Association of Directors of Agriculture and the Southern Association of the National Plant Board and consensus is building. Most importantly, and the reason I am speaking, is we would like the provisions of HR 4049 to be included in the 2007 Farm Bill.

I want to take this opportunity to insure that everyone understands it is not our intention with HR 4049 to inhibit or impede international or interstate commerce, in any way. By enhancing and focusing our efforts toward early pest detection and surveillance, we believe we can get to the source of a potential pest infestation more quickly and more efficiently.

The challenge is not getting any easier, or less costly. Since 1993, the value of U.S. imports has doubled to approximately \$42 billion, reductions to international trade barriers have increased agricultural commerce in and out of the country, and volumes of air cargo are doubling every five to six years.

But this fact cuts both ways – good news for our farmers and trade, but at the expense of an increased flow of pests. We must act now to provide the nation with the greatest level of protection against plant pests and diseases in the midst of the expanded trade environment.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on this very important matter to the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association and I look forward to any questions you may have.